CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies News

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From the Dean's Desk

The Right to be Heard

The Regulations Committee of the Division of Graduate Studies has begun the difficult analysis of the procedures whereby graduate students submit their theses for final oral examination. A question has arisen as to whether students have the *right* to submit their theses even if the advice and recommendation of the thesis supervisor is that the thesis is not ready for defence, or if the judgment of other examiners is negative.

There are two extreme positions on this issue. First, it can be considered to be one of the duties and responsibilities of the thesis supervisor to approve the submission of a thesis for examination. In that case, the interest of the students must be safeguarded by having the departmental thesis and graduate studies committees act as appeals boards in the case of a profound difference of opinion between a supervisor and a student. At the other extreme, it can be considered to be part of the contractual agreement between students and the University that enrolment in a thesis component of a program is similar to the enrolment in a course. Students, therefore, have not only the right but also the duty to submit their work for examination, and they thereby have the possibility of passing or failing an examination.

At Concordia, different segments of the graduate school have different opinions on the official position of the Division of Graduate Studies on this matter. In actual fact there is no official policy that is clear cut. Since becoming Dean almost three years ago, I have intervened on certain occasions and persuaded doctoral candidates to withdraw their theses from examination because it was quite clear from preliminary reports that the theses were inadequate. In almost all cases, an additional effort of six to eight months of revision led to a successful defence.

I suspect that most graduate schools operate on a similar principle of using guidelines rather than hard and fast rules to balance formal rights and academic integrity. There is a clear difference in kind between course work and thesis work. The difference is that a thesis is produced under the "direction" of an experienced and established researcher and requires the creation of new knowledge. The outcome of a thesis defence, therefore, affects not only the student, but also directly reflects the academic credibility of the supervisor and, indirectly, the academic reputation of the university.

The Assembly of Graduate Program Directors will debate this issue and provide a general background for the deliberations of the Regulations Committee. As a result of this process, we hope to present explicit policy recommendations on this matter to the Board of Graduate Studies in the coming academic year.

In my reading on this delicate issue I came across a guideline published by the University of Guelph that seems to represent an interesting starting point for the debate: "The graduate student may expect to ... submit a thesis or major paper for examination even if the supervisory committee does not recommend it; however, such action should only be taken after full discussion with the supervisory committee." (Guidelines for Graduate Students, Faculty, and Graduate Studies Committee, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Guelph, January 1988).

M. E. Szabo

Concordia's Reference Librarians: Online Assistance for Graduate Students

The Vanier Library administration has recently moved from its old quarters into the quiet, clean offices of the new extension on the Loyola Campus. Throughout the move Judy Appleby, Reference/Selection Librarian, has been the Acting Head Librarian.

As a reference librarian, Judy does shift work at the reference desk: she answers questions and helps students find material. She is highly qualified, with a master's degree in Library Science from McGill, and can point even the most confused student in the right direction.

One of the reasons she likes it so much is that she learns something new every day. "Plus," she says, "if I stopped doing it for a while, I would be out of touch with what's happening." She would miss the excitement, the contact with students and faculty, and the positive feeling she gets because she's always learning.

Helping students and faculty find information is the biggest part of her job. The Library has a computerized service where the librarian will search a variety of online and offline databases. This can often be

Judy Appleby, Acting Head Librarian

an important beginning for a thesis or a dissertation since a search of this nature can produce 50 bibliographic references.

Concordia has contracts to access 400 databases, covering all areas of study, including bibliographic references to journals, books or conference proceedings.

As History selection librarian, Appleby chooses all library materials for her subject. These include books, periodicals, trade journals, technological information from online services, compact disks and microfilm. She must stay within her budget and still be aware of all the new publications in her field, what the collection currently offers, which courses are being offered by the History Department and the direction in which the department is moving.

When discussions for a new program take place – such as the recent joint Ph.D. program offered by the Department of Communication Studies – the subject librarian is consulted. She reviews the collection to determine whether the library has the proper resources.

Every five years, the Board of Graduate Studies sets up a panel to evaluate graduate programs, and the librarian for each topic sits in on the appropriate discussion.

There must be an open line of communication between the librarian and the faculty. Appleby says she has a good rapport with the History Depart-

ment; in fact, she attends department meetings. She also does all online searching requested by students and faculty to provide them with references.

Professors often call upon reference librarians to give tailor-made seminars to accomplish specific tasks. These classes may be general in nature, outlining services and facilities, or they may be more detailed, giving instruction in research methods or the use of specific bibliographic materials.

One specialized seminar could be "How to use PsycLIT", one of the library's Compact Disk databases. This is where Helena Gamerio steps in.

Helena Gameiro, accessing information from one of the library's databases.

Gameiro – Reference/Selection Librarian for Psychology, Communication Studies and Journalism – is the resident expert at the Vanier Library for PsycLIT. As part of her duties she recommended that the library acquire PsycLIT, a compact disk database which has more than 1,400 journal entries related to psychology.

There are three CD-databases at Concordia: ERIC, an education resource, ABI/INFORM, business and management and PsycLIT, a database which Gameiro says "strives to have the world's journal literature in psychology." With entries from more that 50 countries, the database has an international flavor.

Access is one of the most important services a reference librarian can offer to a student. As Gameiro says, "The most important thing about computer searching is the techniques – being able to work on a search strategy and use the terminal properly." This is difficult because each of the many systems in the library has a different set of search commands. Online searching is very popular and interest increases every year. During the 1987-88 academic year, the library did 1183 searches for 682 users.

Like Appleby, Gameiro loves her work. "It is hard to keep up in this area of librarianship," she says. "This is a field where you never stop learning."

Librarians are at the forefront of new technology in information science. There is so much information available online and offline that people are limited only by their capacity to access it.

To provide access to the array of references that a computer search comes up with, the library has an inter-library loan service. While working on a topic, students sometimes find they need books only available elsewhere. Books have been ordered from as far away as the Soviet Union and New Zealand. Appleby says new technology speeds up the process of ordering books from afar. Now they place their orders by electronic mail so the request will get there on the same day.

Using new technology has been a source of lively debate among librarians. Appleby says, "We had a dilemma with online searches – to charge or not to charge." The library is committed to providing free information access to students and faculty. They are also committed to new information technologies. Because online costs are so high, the library had no choice but to charge for the service.

A recent Ph.D. graduate has only praise for Concordia's library staff. Her many dealings with the reference librarians, both as a student and a faculty member, elicited the following comment: "They are extremely competent and knowledgeable, patient and interested in helping with particular research questions, and go out of their way for students – with a smile!"

Laura Winer
Ph.D. in Educational Technology Graduate

"I think the real richness of the programs here is the variety of backgrounds among the students," says Laura Winer of the Educational Technology program at Concordia. Winer should know – she

Laura Winer

has been both teacher and student in the Department of Education.

Included among the students in the Educational Technology program are teachers, people from industry and art therapists. "They all share core courses," says Winer, "and then there's room to specialize according to individual interests. What they learn is meaningful because it can be applied to each student's own world."

"I like how Concordia sees educational technology as a distinct field," she says. "Also, we have the traditional schooling approach plus more. Learning and education is not just what goes on in the classroom, and knowledge is not just what is transmitted from teacher to student."

Winer received her B.A. in English literature and then completed both her master's and doctorate in Educational Technology at Concordia. In 1986, Winer became the first Ph.D. recipient in Educational Technology.

One of the courses she teaches to graduate students in the Department of Education, "Small Computer Systems and Software for Teachers and Trainers", is an introductory course in educational computing which includes hardware and software evaluations and planning for the integration of existing software into teaching.

In addition to teaching courses to students at the diploma and master's level, Winer works for A.P.O. Quebec (Centre Québécois de Recherche sur les Applications Pédagogique de l'Ordinateur), a research and development centre in educational computing. The company is funded by the provincial government under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

At A.P.O., Winer heads the computer-based learning environment centre, one of the company's three sectors. Working with primary and secondary-school age children, her department studies the use of computers in education, examining how advanced technology can be used to create a richer learning environment.

Winer's department at A.P.O. currently has nine projects underway, four in-house and five external (located mainly in schools). For example, the internal "Vitrine 2001" project consists of observational research of children on 20 computers: what they learn, what they like, what they don't like, and logistic concerns such as organizing a computer classroom and maintaining interest by offering variety. Another project studies the impact and usefulness of robotics on primary school children.

"Having been a student at Concordia helps me in my work because I feel I have a good background in research design and how to conceptualize research. From what I've seen, students from other universities are not provided with this experience."

"Also, with this program you're able to learn a lot about one field without over-specializing, which means you won't be out of date in a very short time."

Winer's fellow students and her own students have gone on to work in teaching, school administration, banking, research, their own consulting firms, and for large corporations such as CN and Via Rail.

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